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NEW YORK POST

MAY

1951



With Catlike Tread

MURRAY KEMPTON

Richard M. Nixon, who is 49.8 per cent of the president of the United States, comes East this week in what his California friends tell us is a bold assertion of his position as leader of the Republican Party.

He is listed as speaking in Greenville, S. C., tonight and in New York Thursday. The boldness of Mr. Nixon's assertion of opposition leadership fades upon examination.

He will appear in Greenville as guest at the 55th wedding anniversary dinner of the James Byrneses. His host is Charles E. Daniel, former interim Democratic Senator from South Carolina. There will be 55 other guests, and Senator Daniel promises to keep the ceremonies rolling as long as his champagne holds out.

The titular leader of the Republican Party, after taking this forthright stand for golden weddings, comes to New York Thursday to speak at a dinner in the Waldorf. This is also an anniversary; Gardner Cowles of Cowles Publications, has been giving a private dinner for Mr. Nixon every year since 1956; there he answers off-the-record questions from the rulers of America. Mr. Nixon should be better equipped to give informed responses this time than ever before, since he has been cut off from CIA reports since January.

The press, of course, will not be admitted to hear him. Thus Mr. Nixon's bold assertion of leadership begins with two off-the-record dinners. He does go on to Chicago Friday and threatens there to speak in public.

But Mr. Nixon's schedule through Thursday is a fair sample of the state of the opposition at the end of President Kennedy's first 100 days. The right to titular leadership of the Republican Party is asserted as the right to silence.

And this reflects something more than that habit of timidity which either began or was revealed on the first day last summer when Mr.

Nixon started out on his own.

His reason for existence has been destroyed by one-half-of-one-per cent of the American voters. Every model in the department stores looks like Mrs. John F. Kennedy; yet it is not impossible that, give or take a vote here or there, they might all have been looking like Pat Nixon. The Nixon voter, who came closer to forming a majority than any member of a minority has ever come in the United States, was, like Mr. Nixon himself, above all an acceptor.

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Will it be said of Dwight Eisenhower that his worst effect on the Presidency of the United States was that he destroyed indefinitely its position as a partisan office? Richard Nixon always seemed particularly insincere when he suggested that it was an affront to God to criticize the President; can it be that habit has made him believe it?

The Eisenhowers contented great numbers of people with the image of a royal family. It is no more illogical thus to elevate the accidents of politics than it used to be to elevate the accidents of birth. America, especially the America of Richard Nixon, seems with entire satisfaction to have accepted the Kennedys as a royal family. And poor Mr. Nixon is too loyal to the nonsense he has talked all these years to bring any spirit to the role of pretender.

One of the few real arguments he had with President Kennedy during the campaign centered around Senator Kennedy's proposal to liberate Cuba by subsidizing a revolution there. In this area, Mr. Nixon talked great good sense, and events have borne him out. Now, he is happy to have it said that he was secretly for the wrong policy all along. It is as though to say otherwise *lese majeste*. One remembers a Republican Party that was obstructionist and irresponsible. Confronted by this soft silence, I miss those bad old days.